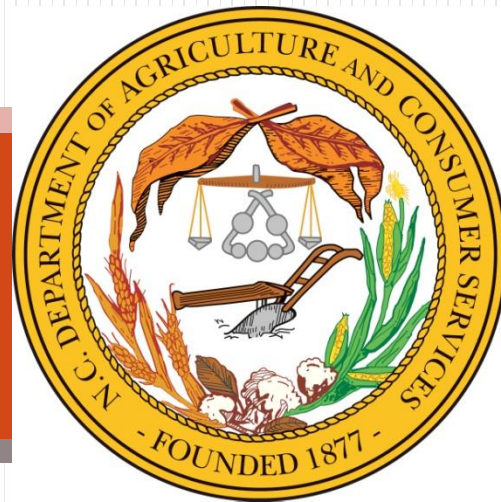


PROJECTING COOPERATOR NEEDS FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

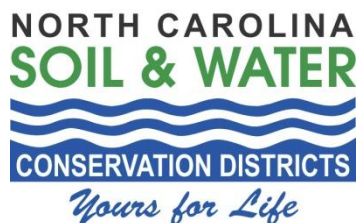


A Soil & Water Conservation Perspective February 19, 2014



Soil & Water Conservation Partnership

- Core partnership comprised of:
 - 96 local Soil & Water Conservation Districts
 - NCDA&CS/Division of Soil & Water Conservation
 - USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Division Mission: to foster voluntary, incentive-driven management of soil, water and related natural resources for the benefit of the environment, economy and all citizens.



Surveyed Farmers and Partnership Staff

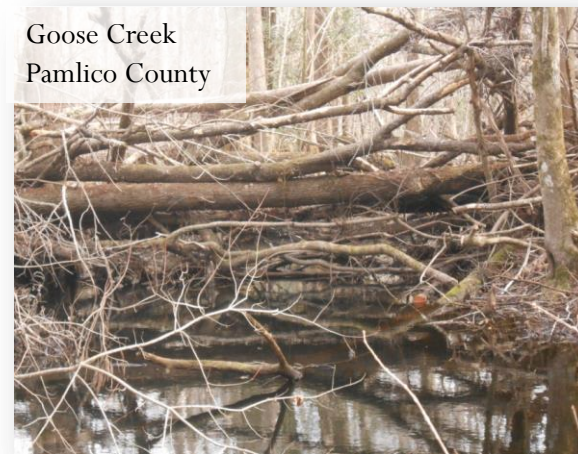
- What services do farmers need?
- What services are missing or increasing difficult to secure?
- What resources do farmers need?
- What regulations are impacting their ability to farm?
- What are their main challenges?
- How can the state help them continue to farm at a profit?

DRAINAGE & FLOOD CONTROL

- Flooding – economic impacts from crop damage/losses; increased potential for reversion of prior converted farmland back to wetlands
- Lack of general maintenance due to:
 - Costs; timing of work
 - Regulatory requirements
 - Limitations on removing debris
 - Manmade channels considered jurisdictional streams

DRAINAGE & FLOOD CONTROL

Lack of funding and gap in coverage between federal programs like the Emergency Watershed Program (threat to structures) and Emergency Conservation Program (cropland, fencing, conservation practices — not stream work)



DRAINAGE & FLOOD CONTROL

An aerial photograph of a river, likely the French Broad River, showing a significant accumulation of fallen trees and branches in the center. The river flows from the top left towards the bottom right. The surrounding area is densely forested with green trees. The water appears slightly turbid near the debris pile. The title 'DRAINAGE & FLOOD CONTROL' is overlaid in a white box at the top.

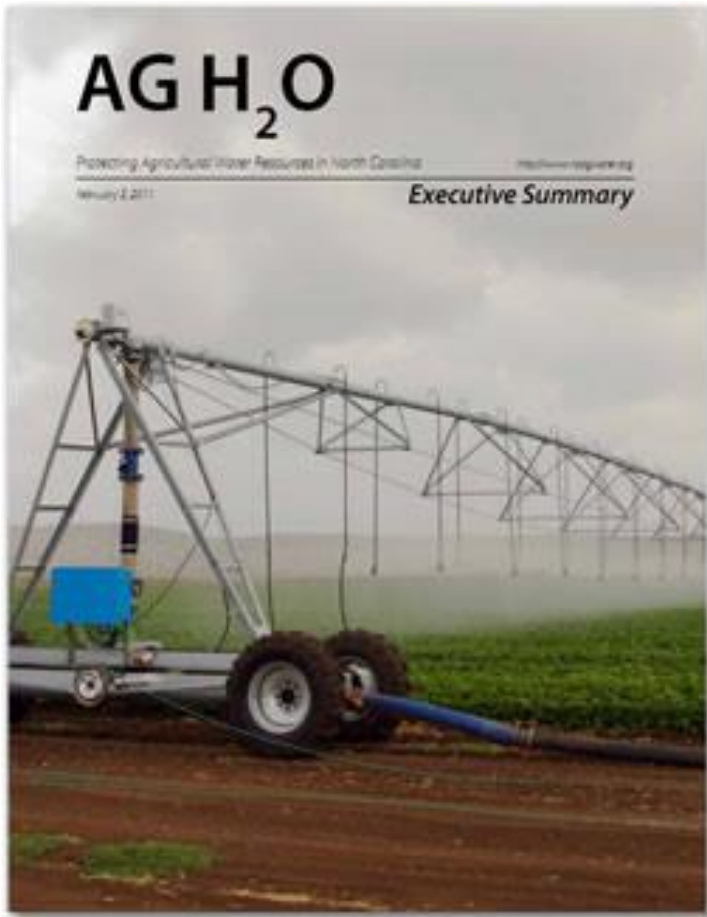
French Broad River
Transylvania County
November 2011

DRAINAGE & FLOOD CONTROL

- Many PL566 structures for flood control have reached their designed life expectancy
- Potential hazard classification changes and safety concerns with downstream development
- Comprehensive structural evaluations needed; renovation and/or replacement challenges



WATER



Released Feb. 2011

The goal of this strategic plan is to conserve, protect and develop North Carolina agricultural water resources

Objectives:

1. Plan oversight & development
2. Ag Water Infrastructure
3. Ag Water Use Survey
4. Best Practices
5. Cost Share Program (AgWRAP-thank you!)
6. Education

<http://www.ncagwater.org/>

WATER

- Reduced competition with other users
- Continued efforts to improve water storage infrastructure
- Food Safety Modernization Act
- Agricultural water and wastewater reuse
- Subsurface water management
- Irrigation efficiencies



SUBSURFACE WATER MANAGEMENT



PRODUCTIVE AND AFFORDABLE FARMLAND

- Urbanization - land fragmentation; decreasing availability/loss of rental land
- Absentee landowners — lack understanding of need for land improvements; short term outlook
- High rental rates are a challenge to new and beginning farmers
- Farmers more likely to invest in conservation measures on their own land vs. rental land

LIABILITY

- Frivolous nuisance lawsuits
- High cost of liability insurance associated with animal operations
- Conflicts with non-farm neighbors
- General public lacks understanding of agriculture
- Air surveillance open to interpretation (need to “ground-truth”)



Improved Response Time For Wetlands Determinations

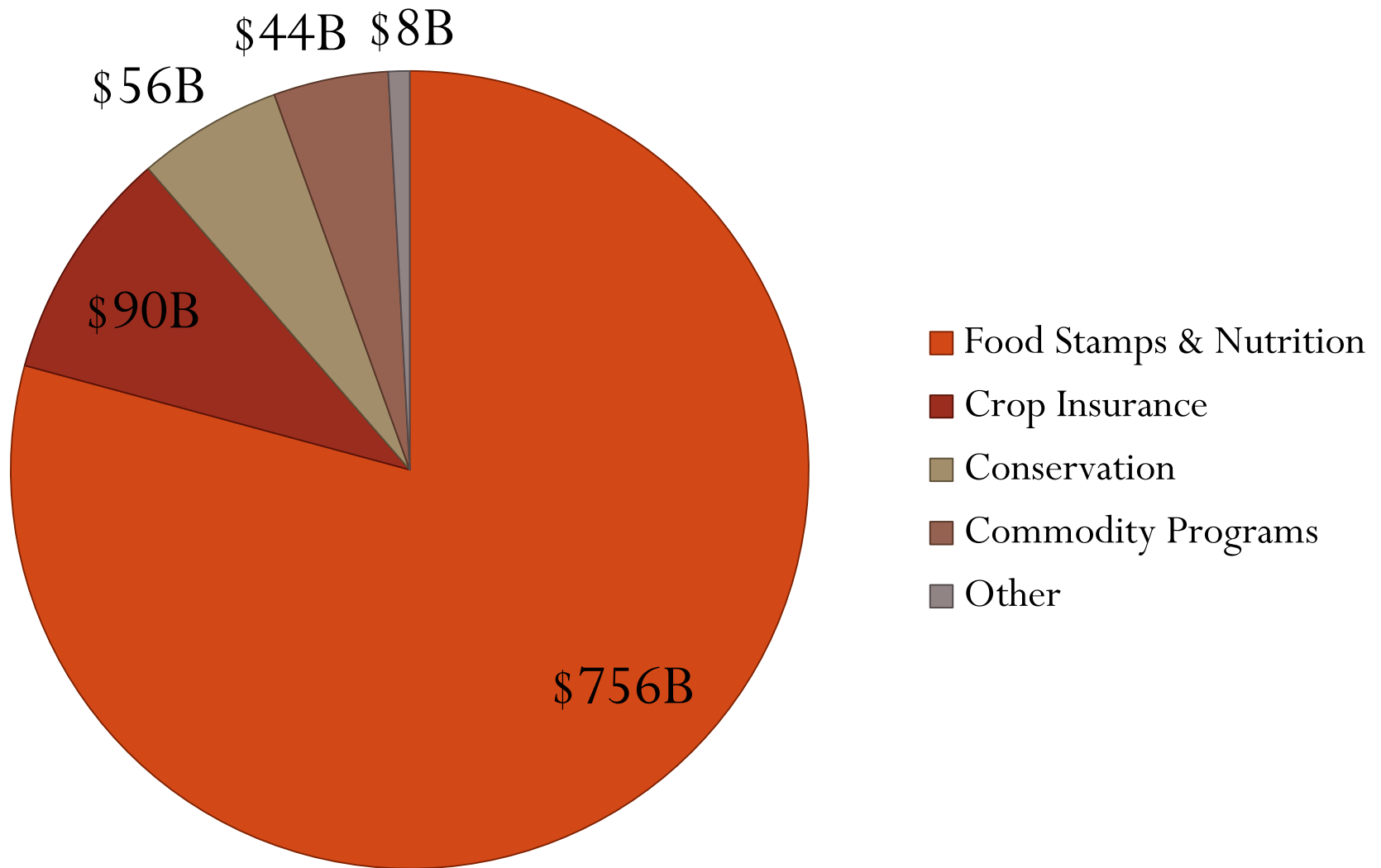
- Land clearing hindrance to farmers responding to market changes
- Reasonable 2-3 wk. response — delays causing loss of entire production season
- USDA has jurisdiction over determinations through the AD1026 process (FSA and NRCS)
- DSWC support through state soil scientists

WETLANDS JURISDICTIONAL DETERMINATIONS

- Rivers & Harbors Act of 1899 (Sec.10) and Clean Water Act (Sec. 404)
- Corps determination does not meet the requirements of the Food Security Act
- Violation = discharge of dredge or fill material (w/out permit) within waters of US, including wetlands (civil action)
- Food Security Act of 1985, as amended
- USDA determination does not meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act
- Non-Compliance = producing or making possible the production of agricultural commodities on wetlands (loss of eligibility for USDA benefits)



Agricultural Act of 2014



CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE

- Conservation (Title II)
- Emphasis on conservation compliance provisions — farmer must comply with conservation compliance requirements for Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and/or wetlands for crop insurance premium support eligibility
- Must farm according to an approved conservation plan (5 yrs. to comply)
- HEL will have 2 yrs. to comply

Technical Assistance Challenges

- Significant loss of federal, state and local technical staff to retirements, competing interests
- Replacement staff require extensive training
- Decreasing federal support for training of local district field staff
- Limited # of certified conservation planners and employees with appropriate job approval authority



Technical Assistance Challenges

- Ability to make decisions without multiple agency reviews and costly permit fees
- Agency staff turnover
- Complex and changing rules; open to regulatory interpretation
- Communication



Research & Development

- Soil Health (improved yields; reduced inputs)
- Control of diseases, invasive/resistant plants and pests
- Precision agriculture
- Energy – biofuels, wind, solar
- Improved animal waste management (15A NCAC 02T.1307)
Performance Standards - recommend eliminating reference to “synthetic liner” because synthetic liners have a conductivity rate and will not totally eliminate seepage... replace eliminate with “substantially eliminate” in criteria (1), similar to the remaining criteria.



Miscellaneous

- Labor is the biggest issue facing farmers
- Need to attract next generation of farmers (e.g. FFA, incentives to attract young people)
- Find ways to add value to Ag products
- Overcome challenges to marketing locally (e.g. local beef producers face challenges to process, distribute and market meat)
- Highway transportation issues
 - Safety
 - Ability to move equipment
 - Bridge and road weight and width restrictions